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## SUB-ROMAN BRITAIN: HISTORY AND LEGEND<sup>1</sup>

The 1970s have so far seen the publication of two large works, by established scholars, dealing with the period of transition in Britain from Roman occupation to independent Anglo-Saxon and Brittonic kingdoms. One of the chief common features of Leslie Alcock's *Arthur's Britain* and John Morris's *The Age of Arthur* is apparent from their titles<sup>2</sup>, namely a readiness to assign to our 'once and future king' not merely an historical but an historically important role in the events of the late fifth century.<sup>3</sup> Further, both of these authors, breaking with the twentieth-century tradition of English historiography, have seen fit to assign a great importance to written sources deriving from the Celtic-speaking countries. It might be thought that historians interested in the Celtic world, and indeed scholars involved in other aspects of Celtic studies, would wish to welcome these developments, since they force the reluctant Anglo-Saxon to come to terms with neglected Celtic texts.

Not a bit of it! And in order to show why I, for one, deeply regret this development in the writing of fifth-century political history in particular, I propose to devote this paper to precisely those personalities and those issues which require for their survival—indeed for their very existence—in our history books the support of Celtic sources. We must pass under the closest critical scrutiny the evidence provided by all the putative witnesses to the history of the period. Let me say at this point that the major difficulty, as I see it, is that most of the available written 'evidence' is more apparent than real. Critical assessment of the earliest of these sources, which date only from the end of the eighth and the earlier ninth centuries, is still in its infancy, and writers who invite us to swallow the testimony of these sources

<sup>1</sup> Versions of this paper have been delivered as lectures to the Mediaeval Society, University College, Cardiff; to the University of Oxford; and to the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto. I am grateful to my audiences for their constructive criticisms. The following abbreviations are used in the notes: *A.B.*, *Analecta Bollandiana*; *B.B.C.S.*, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*; *C.M.*, *Classica et Mediaevalia*; *E.H.R.*, *English Historical Review*; *J.T.S.*, *Journal of Theological Studies*; Lloyd, John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (3rd edn, 2 vols, London, 1939); *N.M.S.*, *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*; *P.B.A.*, *Proceedings of the British Academy*; *P.R.I.A.*, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*; *S.C.*, *Studia Celtica*; *S.H.*, *Studia Hibernica*; *T.C.W.A.A.S.*, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain. History and Archaeology, A.D. 367–634* (London, 1971); \* John Morris, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650* (London, 1973; 2nd revised edn, 1973). For a comprehensive and detailed appraisal and rebuttal of Morris's work, see the review by D. P. Kirby and J. E. C. Williams, *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 454–86; a judicious and highly stimulating review by J. Campbell may be seen in *S.H.* 15 (1975), 177–85.

<sup>3</sup> Alcock states that 'in terms of *Realpolitik*' Arthur's achievement was negligible (p. 364). Notwithstanding this, his book is centred on Arthur and accords him an important (if ultimately insignificant) role in this period. On the use of the term 'Arthurian' for this age, cf. Charles Thomas, 'Are these the walls of Camelot?', *Antiquity* 43 (1969), 27–30.

offer only large doses of 'tradition' as the sweetener of this Celtic pill. The plain fact of the matter is that those who have recently made such large use of Celtic sources in the writing of fifth- and sixth-century history have not done the fundamental part of their homework and have therefore failed to appreciate the nature of the source-material which they have so freely employed.

It will be apparent, therefore, that I have the gravest doubts about the acceptability of what I might call the 'Arthurian' approach to the problems of the political history of fifth- and sixth-century Britain. Before proceeding, however, to an examination of the sources we might ask ourselves what are the important issues in fifth- and sixth-century British history, and what is the type of information that we should wish to extract from our sources taken as a whole.

Inevitably the most important question, the one which has chiefly exercised historians, is the nature of the military crises of these two centuries. Both centuries are politically dark, and the sixth—it might seem—rather more so than the fifth. One would wish to know not only how the political face of Britain in A.D. 500 differed from that of 400 and of 600, but also how changes came about; how the government of Britain evolved; how Christian belief spread; the nature of ecclesiastical organization; and the extent to which there remained a concept of *romanitas* in Celtic Britain. Furthermore, since this was for Britain a time of migration on a grand scale, we should wish to discover something of the nature and extent of these movements and their relationship both to the great linguistic changes which occurred at this time in the Brittonic dialects of Celtic<sup>4</sup> and to the changes of function and status which Latin underwent in Britain in this period. There are vital questions, too, about economics and society: the role of coinage; the survival or destruction of town and villa life;<sup>5</sup> the nature of the contact between Celt and Saxon; the laws under which men lived;<sup>6</sup> and the changing structure of social relationships among both the British and the Anglo-Saxons.

We might hope, in our more wildly optimistic moments, that our written sources would provide some clues which would help us to formulate more pointed and detailed questions than the supremely general ones which I have just mentioned. In particular, we might expect the Welsh literary sources, as deriving from a people which in the fifth century was equipped with men who could read and write Latin and who enjoyed a Roman standard of civilization, to tell us something of the development of Britain

<sup>4</sup> These are chronicled by Kenneth H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain. A chronological survey of the Brittonic languages, 1st to 12th c. A.D.* (Edinburgh, 1953).

<sup>5</sup> For recent studies of these aspects, see John Wacher, *The Towns of Roman Britain* (London, 1974) and John Percival, *The Roman Villa* (London, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> C. E. Stevens, 'A possible conflict of laws in Roman Britain', *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), 132–4; id., 'The social and economic aspects of rural settlement', in Charles Thomas (ed.), *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (London, 1966), 108–28; G. R. J. Jones, in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* I, 2, A.D. 43–1042 (Cambridge, 1972), 279–382 (e.g., at 324f.). S. Applebaum's interesting remarks, *ibid.*, 250–65, are the less useful for his decision to rely, for the political history and the chronology of the fifth century, on John Morris, 'Dark age dates', in Michael G. Jarrett and Brian Dobson (edd.), *Britain and Rome. Essays presented to Eric Birley on his sixtieth birthday* (Kendal, 1965), 145–85.

in the period 400–600. What, then, can the Welsh evidence tell us of these great issues? Let us consider the sources by arranging them conveniently in four rough groups, according to age or type.

The first of my groups comprises the very late sources. These include the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Welsh romances—one of which, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, was used by John Morris as evidence (a direct statement, he called it) that Hengest's son Oisc (Æsc) was present at the Battle of Mount Badon! Then there is the Latin 'History of the Kings of Britain' by Geoffrey of Monmouth, written in the 1130s, and one of the greatest romantic novels of all time, the work whose popularity unleashed on Europe (in a way which might otherwise never have been achieved) the Arthurian romance which is still with us and which has been responsible for some of the finest (and some of the most banal) works of European literature.<sup>7</sup> We know as yet almost nothing of Geoffrey's native sources, and little of the way in which he handled them; in no modern sense is he a historian, however, and few today would care to use his work in writing our early history. This group should contain also the Welsh Latin saints' Lives of the late eleventh and twelfth century which include some characters allegedly, or in fact, of the fifth century and, more commonly, of the sixth. We cannot, however, expect that these works will ever provide information about the sub-Roman centuries. The appearance of early kings in this type of literature is not to be taken automatically as an actual and early association of king and saint—there are usually both general and detailed arguments against such links—but must be seen in terms of the literary genre in question. Among other things, we may expect a saint's Life to claim property and rights in the locality of its monastery. These claims will automatically be expressed—for such was the convention of hagiography throughout the Celtic-speaking world—in terms of an original grant, by the founder of the local royal dynasty, to the founder (such as Teilo, Cadog, or Garmon) of the monastic community or, later, the episcopal see which claims descent from the saint's own day in the fifth or sixth century. These saints' Lives are used extensively by Morris as sources for *The Age of Arthur*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *The Age of Arthur*, 112f. The text is edited by Melville Richards, *Breudwyd Ronabwy* (Cardiff, 1948) and translated in Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, *The Mabinogion* (2nd edn, London, 1949), 137–52. For brief discussion, see I. Ll. Foster in Roger S. Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages. A collaborative history* (Oxford, 1959) (cited henceforth as *A.L.M.A.*), 39–43. For Morris's views on the comparable text *Breuddwyd Maxen*, see *The Age of Arthur*, 419: 'a straightforward historical narrative, its main facts accurate'.

<sup>8</sup> Edited by Edmond Faral, *La légende arthurienne* (Paris, 1929), iii. 64–303; translated by \* Lewis Thorpe, *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1966). An indispensable companion is J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1950). W. L. Jones, *King Arthur in History and Legend* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1914) is still an attractive thumbnail sketch.

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Wade-Evans (ed. and tr.), *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff, \* 1944). See also P. Grosjean, 'Vie de Saint Cadoc par Caradoc de Llancarfan', *A.B.* 60 (1942), 35–67. Details of the Cornish saints' Lives, all of which are late, may be extracted from G. H. Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*, ed. D. Attwater (Truro, 1960– ); further material regarding Cornish saints' Lives may be drawn from articles by P. Grosjean in *A.B.* 58 (1940), 71 (1953), and 74 (1956), which deal with the evidence of the Gotha codex. For comment on Morris's views, cf. Kirby and Williams, *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 459; and for a surprisingly cautious earlier assessment by Morris of the sources for the 'Celtic Age of the Saints', see his 'The Dates of the Celtic Saints', *J.T.S.*, N.S., 17 (1966), 342–91.

The second group of sources—that which has been thought to contain evidence of the greatest value for the fifth and sixth centuries—dates from an approximate period 770 to 960. This is the group of texts called by Professor Alcock the 'British Historical Miscellany', namely the *Historia Brittonum*, the *Annales Cambrie* and the Harleian collection of Welsh royal genealogies. To these I should add the Pillar of Elise, dating from the first half of the ninth century, set up by King Cyngen of Powys, and bearing a largely genealogical inscription.<sup>10</sup>

Let us take each of these items in turn. The *Annales Cambrie*, as we have them, belong to the middle of the tenth century, but survive in an English manuscript of ca 1100. Dr. Kathleen Hughes has recently established beyond doubt that they constitute a contemporary St. Davids record kept from the late eighth century onwards. The north British entries appear to derive in part from an earlier northern set of annals which is also used by Irish annalists and which may have had annalistic entries going back to the later years of the sixth century (though whether they were contemporary records is still to be debated). The other early entries are retrospective annals which date, at the earliest, from ca 770 or 780, and, at the latest, from the mid-tenth century. There is no question, as Dr. Hughes has made clear, of the fifth- and earlier-sixth-century entries deriving from a contemporary source, and certainly not from marginal entries in paschal tables of the fifth century onwards, as Alcock would have us believe.<sup>11</sup>

The *Historia Brittonum*, surviving in the same manuscript as the *Annales Cambrie* but enjoying also a rich and varied textual tradition represented to us today by some forty surviving mediaeval manuscripts, has been employed by Alcock and Morris, among others, as one of the major sources for the British fifth century. Since the sixteenth century, the work has been represented to us as the creation of one 'Nennius'; I think this is a mistake,<sup>12</sup> but the name of the author is unimportant in itself. What is important is that the 'Nennian' attribution brings with it the prologue of 'Ninnius' or 'Nennius' with its statement that the author had made a heap of all that he had found; if that be accepted as a statement of the author's principles, we are compelled to regard him as an incompetent oaf.<sup>13</sup> This

\* <sup>10</sup> Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 29–41, 45–71, 80–8. The texts are printed together by Faral, op. cit., iii.1–63. I have prepared a new edition of the *Historia Brittonum*; there are older editions by Theodor Mommsen, *Chronica Minora Saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, iii (Berlin, 1894–8), 111–222, who gives no historical introduction, and by Ferdinand Lot, *Nennius et l'Historia Brittonum* (2 vols, Paris, 1934), whose text is unusable but who was the first editor to discuss the historical questions raised by this work. The annals and genealogies from BL, MS Harley 3859 are meticulously printed by E. Phillimore, *Y Cymmrodor* 9 (1888), 141–83; the Welsh genealogies are collected and edited by P. C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966). The Pillar of Elise is studied by Bartrum, op. cit., 1–3.

\* <sup>11</sup> The fundamental study is by K. Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and related texts', *P.B.A.* 59 (1973), 233–58. On the date of the annals for the fifth and sixth centuries, see Hughes, loc. cit., 234–7, 239–42, against Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 39–40, 45–55. In 'Date-guessing and Dyfed', *S.C.* 12–13 (1977–8), 33–61, M. Miller provides important evidence for continuing work on the retrospective section of these annals at St. Davids within the period ca 800 x 955.

<sup>12</sup> See D. N. Dumville, '“Nennius” and the *Historia Brittonum*', *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 78–95.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, the prologue can perfectly well be read in terms of the common mediaeval modesty topos; however, the fact is that modern historians have read this prologue in a wholly literal way.

view has in turn brought with it the belief that his very inability to produce an intelligent piece of historical writing has allowed him to reproduce almost unaltered earlier sources of some value for the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-century history of Britain. The rejection of the prologue—which occupies a secondary and late position in the textual tradition of the work—allows the *Historia Brittonum* to be considered on its merits. In my estimation, the anonymous early-ninth-century author of the *Historia* was a synchronizing historian of the type we meet regularly in mediaeval Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Irish, he was not suffering from a surfeit of contradictory material and of wilful powers of inventiveness; he struggled rather with inadequate source-material, especially for the fifth century. For his account of the period 547–685 he took the Northumbrian regnal list as his chronological framework, almost certainly because there was no comparably coherent structure to be derived from his Brittonic source-materials.<sup>15</sup> On the whole, I feel he made a rather competent attempt at an appallingly difficult task, especially with the very unsatisfactory sources at his disposal. But the very fact that he was attempting to write history, that he did think about the problems presented by his sources and the necessity to harmonize them, and that he did not simply bodily incorporate pre-existing texts into his work without alteration, means that we must apply the same critical techniques to this text as we should to any other 'historical' narrative. His sources for the fifth century were: the chronicles of Prosper of Aquitaine and Isidore of Seville, both of which probably came as continuations of the Eusebius-Jerome Chronicle (to A.D. 378) which he also used; the *Cursus Paschalis*, with consular names perhaps extending to about A.D. 520, of Victorius of Aquitaine;<sup>16</sup> a legendary account, or accounts, of St. Patrick; a *Liber Beati Germani*, arguably written in the reign of Cadell of Powys, who died in 808;<sup>17</sup> a Welsh (vernacular) poem on the battles of Arthur; and some English material, chiefly a legend of Hengest and Horsa and their dealings with Gwrtheyrn (Vortigern) and Gwrthefyr (Vortemir). These were interwoven by our author to provide a discontinuous and not entirely coherent attempt at an interpretation of fifth-century British history. I trust that the mere recital of these sources will suggest their utter flimsiness as records of this obscure century of our history.

The Pillar of Elise, with its genealogical propaganda for the Powys dynasty, forms a convenient link between the *Historia Brittonum* and the Harleian collection of genealogies. Roughly coeval with the *Historia*, it provides a secular counterpart to the story of Gwrtheyrn and St. Garmon rehearsed in the *Liber Beati Germani*. Both express the links which bound the Powys dynasty to the churches, particularly that of Llanarmon-yn-Iâl, which regarded St. Garmon as their founder; both express this relationship in terms of hagiographic commonplaces, a professional terminology which it is perilous to read literally.

<sup>14</sup> For some account of this type of historical activity, see Eoin Mac Neill, *Celtic Ireland* (Dublin, 1921), 25–42.

<sup>15</sup> D. N. Dumville, 'On the North British section of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976–7), 345–54.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of one aspect of the use of these sources, see D. N. Dumville, 'Some aspects of the chronology of the *Historia Brittonum*', *B.B.C.S.* 25 (1972–4), 439–45.

<sup>17</sup> See below, p. 186.

The genealogical collections have so far received almost no critical study.<sup>18</sup> In several cases, the pedigrees in the Harleian collection appear to stretch back to the fifth century or beyond. But Celtic genealogies are not a historical record. They express a legal or political claim. They may be historically accurate, but will only be so where they have not been corrupted in transmission and, much more importantly, where historical accuracy does not conflict with the claims made by the owner or author of the genealogy.<sup>19</sup> We shall have occasion to see some uses to which genealogy was put when we consider some of the main figures thrown up by early Welsh historiography. The Harleian collection, taken as a body, exists to document the position of Owain of Deheubarth (950–88), a representative of the Second Dynasty of Gwynedd, founded in 826 by Merfyn Frych (the father of Rhodri the Great who brought almost the whole of Wales under his control). We must remember this when we attempt to use its evidence.<sup>20</sup>

So much for the so-called 'British Historical Miscellany', my second group of sources. In the third group we may place the early Welsh poetic traditions: those of the *Gododdin* attributed to Aneirin and the twelve poems said to be the genuine *oeuvre* of Taliesin.<sup>21</sup> To these we should add the triads which had indexed early Welsh lore and legend in the period before Geoffrey of Monmouth.<sup>22</sup> I do not wish to take up here a position on the authenticity or otherwise of those poems;<sup>23</sup> but if they have a claim to be part of the historical record, it is that of the later sixth century. One point which I would make in passing, however, is this: that as works which, in principle, cannot be dated more securely than between the late sixth century (the alleged period of their composition) and the end of the eleventh century (when the orthography of Old Welsh began to be radically modified and the old Insular script ceased to be used in Wales)<sup>24</sup> they cannot be used by the historian. Before he can press them into service in writing the history of any century, he must demand a more precise linguistic dating from the student of philology. If that cannot be offered, he must await the time when historiographical and literary-historical research

\* <sup>18</sup> See now, for a scientific beginning, three papers by M. Miller: 'Date-guessing and pedigrees', *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 96–109; 'Historicity and the Pedigrees of the Northcountrymen', *B.B.C.S.* 26 (1974–6), 255–80; 'Date-guessing and Dyfed', *S.C.* 12–13 (1977–8), 33–61. Compare the work done on early Irish genealogies: F. J. Byrne, *Ériu* 22 (1971), 145–9; J. V. Kelleher, 'The pre-Norman Irish genealogies', *Irish Historical Studies* 16 (1968–9), 138–53.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Past and Present* no. 56 (August 1972), p. 32, n. 54.

<sup>20</sup> For the history of the Second Dynasty, see Lloyd, i. 323–46.

<sup>21</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Text of the Book of Aneirin* (Pwllheli, 1908), gives a diplomatic text (the rest should be ignored); Ifor Williams, *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff, 1938) is the standard edition; K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin. The oldest Scottish poem* (Edinburgh, 1969) provides an introduction to the subject for English readers and translates what can be translated. On Taliesin, see J. Morris-Jones, *Y Cymmrodor* 28 (1918); Ifor Williams and J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin* (Dublin, 1968). Morris-Jones and Ifor Williams differ on the canon of poems to be attributed to Taliesin; this difference is in itself instructive.

\* <sup>22</sup> Rachel Bromwich (ed. and tr.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein. The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff, 1961; a second edition is in preparation), which includes a superb prosopography of the early Welsh literary tradition.

\* <sup>23</sup> For current controversy, see D. Greene, *S.C.* 6 (1971), 1–11; P. Mac Cana, *Celtica* 9 (1971), 316–29; K. H. Jackson, *S.C.* 8–9 (1973–4), 1ff.

\* <sup>24</sup> Cf. D. N. Dumville, 'Palaeographical considerations in the dating of early Welsh verse', *B.B.C.S.* 27 (1976–8), 246–51.

may have reached the point when it can accept or reject these poems as creations of the sixth century or, say, the tenth.

Finally, we come to the fourth group, comprising our two really early literary sources, the genuine works of St. Patrick,<sup>25</sup> belonging to the second half of the fifth century, and Gildas's tract *De excidio Brianniae et conquestu*,<sup>26</sup> written in the mid-sixth. Patrick's two pieces, very valuable though they are, are in many ways specialist documents and shed light only on a few aspects of British history. Gildas, by contrast, attempts in Book I of his work a narrative account, with some sociological commentary, of the history of Britain from the fourth century to his own day. It is with Gildas, our earliest native literary source for the general history of fifth-century Britain, that we may turn from our survey of the witnesses to a more detailed discussion of their major themes.

Three main ideas about the end of Roman power in Britain are purveyed by mediaeval Welsh scholarship. We meet with the first in Gildas, I. 13–14. Gildas took the view that the ruin of Britain began with the island's throwing up usurpers (*tyranni*), among whose rebellions that of Magnus Maximus (in 383–8) was the most significant, and the most dangerous to Britain's security. According to Gildas, Maximus took from Britain its best soldiery and the flower of its youth, never to return. The consequent weakening of the British defence led to a series of disasters, in which the Romans appear merely as intermittent rescuers, unable after the conclusion of the Second Pictish War even to undertake that limited role. Maximus's story is well known: in 383 he left Britain for Gaul at the head of an army to seize the imperial throne for himself, notwithstanding Orosius's claim (*Historia adversum paganos*, VII. 34) that he was raised unwilling to his *imperium*. For a few years he established himself also in Gaul and Spain, with headquarters at Trier. But in 388 he was finally killed during an attempt to take Italy and establish himself as Western Emperor.<sup>27</sup>

\* <sup>25</sup> Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii* (2 vols, Dublin, 1952), reprinted from *C.M.* 11 (1950), 1–150, and 12 (1951), 79–214; for a translation, see R. P. C. Hanson, *N.M.S.* 15 (1971), 3–26. On dating, I accept the consensus reached by Irish historians (cf. James Carney, *The Problem of St. Patrick* [Dublin, 1961]; D. A. Binchy, 'St. Patrick and his biographers, ancient and modern', *S.H.* 2 [1962], 7–173; A. P. Smyth, 'The earliest Irish annals: their first contemporary entries, and the earliest centres of recording', *P.R.I.A.* 72 C [1972], 1–48, and 'The Húi Néill and the Leinstermen in the Annals of Ulster, 431–516 A.D.', *Études celtiques* 14 [1974–5], 121–43, esp. 126f.) as opposed to the views of R. P. C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick, his origins and career* (Oxford, 1968), which seem to me to rely wholly on arguments from our ignorance of conditions in the independent sub-Roman Britain of the fifth century. But for a most effective assault on the Irish scholars' position, see J. Morris, *J.T.S.*, N. S., 17 (1966), 358–75, esp. 369–72; his objections require careful consideration.

\* <sup>26</sup> Theodor Mommsen (ed.), op. cit. (n. 10 above), iii. 1–85; Hugh Williams (ed. and tr.), *Gildas* (2 vols, London, 1899–1901). Essential supplements are W. H. Davies, 'Gildas: some textual notes and corrections', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 15 [N. S., 2] (1939), 42–8; M. Winterbottom, 'Notes on the text of Gildas', *J.T.S.*, N. S., 27 (1976), 132–40. For discussion of the possible publication-dates, see M. Miller, *B.B.C.S.* 26 (1974–6), 169–74.

\* <sup>27</sup> A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602. A social, economic, and administrative survey* (Oxford, 1964), i. 158f.; id., *The Decline of the Ancient World* (London, 1966), 68; Sheppard Frere, *Britannia. A history of Roman Britain* (2nd edn, London, 1974), 404–6, but Frere is quite wrong in saying that Maximus 'was long remembered as a hero in Celtic folk-memory and tradition' (p. 405; cf. p. 406). For Maximus on the Continent, see Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila. The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1976), 111–26, and the references given there.

We know from Orosius,<sup>28</sup> as Gildas must have done, since he too read that author, that there were more British usurpers, including, in the year 407, Constantine III. But Dr. Miller has recently shown us that the reason why Gildas ignored Constantine III after his account of Maximus in I. 13–14 was that the structure of his narrative would render mention of Constantine irrelevant to his account (in I. 14–21) of the *northern* wars of the end of the fourth and first half of the fifth century.<sup>29</sup>

Gildas's omission was to have two profoundly significant historiographical effects. The first was on Bede, who 'corrected' Gildas's narrative and so arguably introduced a chronological distortion which—in spite of its major problems (like the telescoping of the period of affluence recorded by Gildas to four or five years at the very most)<sup>30</sup>—has controlled English historiography ever since. The second effect was on early Welsh scholarship for which, inevitably, Gildas was the founding text. The direct evidence of the *Historia Brittonum*, the next Brittonic work of history, is that Gildas was well studied.<sup>31</sup> Other evidence, from that text and elsewhere, indicates that his work had had a profound influence on historical and political thought in early Wales.

From 388, the date of Maximus's death, the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought derived its calculations. Maximus, as the only 'British' emperor identifiable in early Wales and as a person of the greatest historical significance in Gildas's work, becomes the founding figure of independent post-Roman Britain.<sup>32</sup> Already in Gildas, as I have pointed out, he is held responsible for denuding Britain of all its troops, and his legend is under way. By the time he emerges again, in the ninth century, he has grown to be a figure of the greatest stature. He develops an invented family through which Brittonic rulers claim descent from him, either in the direct male line<sup>33</sup> or by 'marrying' the head of their dynastic pedigree to a daughter of Maximus.<sup>34</sup> He appears both as the last Roman emperor in Britain and as the first ruler of an independent Britain, from whom all legitimate power flowed—a pleasing irony, in view of his actual history as a usurper. From his death, therefore, begins the history of the independent Brittonic kingdoms. This view is attested for three major Welsh kingdoms: for Gwynedd and Powys in ninth-century records and for

<sup>28</sup> Book VII of Orosius's History is fundamental for the closing years of Romano-British history. The standard editions are those of Carl Zangemeister, *Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri VII; accedit eiusdem Liber Apologeticus* (Wien, 1882) and *Pauli Orosii ... Libri VII* (Leipzig, 1889). For a translation, see Roy J. Deferrari, *Orosius: Seven Books against the Pagans* (Washington, D.C., 1964).

<sup>29</sup> M. Miller, 'Bede's use of Gildas', *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 241–61. This article constitutes the most important single contribution to the twentieth-century historical study of Gildas.

<sup>30</sup> Most recently discussed by D. J. V. Fisher, *The Anglo-Saxon Age, c. 400–1042* (London, 1973), 16–22.

<sup>31</sup> Reminiscences of, or quotations from, *De Excidio* are found in Harl. §§3 (where I. 3 is the major source), 9 (cf. I. 14–15), 17 (cf. I. 4–5), 24 (cf. I. 13–14), 28 (I. 17 and cf. I. 6, 15, and 20; I. 7), 34 (I. 19), 53 and 61 (cf. I. 26); in Mommsen-Lot, these are cc. 7–9, 15, 19, 27, 30, 37, 57 and 63 respectively.

<sup>32</sup> He is known also as 'Maximianus' in Latin sources of Welsh and English origin; Welsh vernacular sources call him 'Macsen' (<Latin *Maxentius*). A study of the occurrences of the different forms, and their possible ideological significance, might be instructive. For a late mediaeval continental example of the use of Maximianus, see Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, 151, n. 4.

Dyfed in a tenth-century text.<sup>35</sup> It seems to me that Maximus is arguably the literary source of inspiration for Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur, who does such great—but ultimately unsuccessful—deeds as a British emperor on the Continent.

The second main idea, in early Welsh scholarship, about sub-Roman Britain is closely connected to the story of Maximus. It seeks to explain and justify the creation of the kingdoms of north and west Wales. This is, of course, the story of Cunedda. Cunedda is said by sources of the ninth century, and later, to have been ruler of the area known as Manaw of (the) Gododdin, a kingdom which bordered on the Firth of Forth.<sup>36</sup> The larger unit, the *Gododdin*, were known to Ptolemy as the *Ōtadini*, and they seem therefore to have retained their tribal identity throughout the Roman period, emerging perhaps as a group of kingdoms, of which Manaw may have been the most important, by the fifth or sixth century.<sup>37</sup> Cunedda is said to have come with eight of his nine sons, from the North to Wales from which he expelled the Irish who had settled there.<sup>38</sup> His sons are said to have given their names to Welsh kingdoms, subkingdoms, and *cantrefi*: Rhufon to Rhufoniog; Dunod to Dunoding; Ceredig to Cerëdigion; and so on. This is in effect a statement of the foundation of Gwynedd.

A great deal of time and energy has been wasted in attempts to establish where within the period 350–450 this alleged movement—it has been called a migration—can be fitted.<sup>39</sup> Mrs. Nora Chadwick, however, was able

<sup>33</sup> The kings of Dyfed claim direct descent from Maximus by making him the father of their eponym *Dimet*: see Bartrum, op. cit., pp. 10 (HG §2), 45f. (JC §13), and 106 (ABT §18[a]). This gives the representatives of the Second Dynasty of Gwynedd in Dyfed descent from Maximus through the female line. They claim this also through the male line in JC §19 (Bartrum, p. 46) which gives Maximid ancestry also to the rulers of Man, their ancestors; this is seen too in HG §4 (Bartrum, p. 10) where the direct connexion with the Second Dynasty of Gwynedd is not explicitly stated. Late attributions of Maximid ancestry are found in connexion with St. Cadog (and thus the kings of Gwynllŵg) and with those North Britons for whom Dyfnwal Hen is claimed as common ancestor (Bartrum pp. 24 [Lifris, *Vita S. Cadoci*, §45] and 44 [JC §4] for Gwynllŵg; pp. 57 [ByS §18] and 73 [BGG §§8–12] for the North).

<sup>34</sup> As in the pedigree of the kings of Powys on the Pillar of Elise (Bartrum, pp. 1–3). For a very late development of this sort with regard to Cornwall, see Bartrum, p. 130, but cf. BGG §13 (p. 73) to which he fails to refer.

<sup>35</sup> For details, see above, n. 33 (Dyfed), n. 34 (Powys), and the discussion below of Cunedda (esp. p. 182) for Gwynedd. Lack of comparable records may be the sole reason why we do not have similar statements for South Wales east of Dyfed. But note the late texts cited above (in n. 33) for Gwynllŵg.

<sup>36</sup> See K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin*, pp. 69–75.

<sup>37</sup> For discussion of a related group of problems, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Native political organization in Roman Britain and the origin of MW *brenhin*', in Manfred Mayrhofer et al. (edd.), *Antiquitates Indogermanicae. Studien zur indogermanischen Altertumskunde und zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der indogermanischen Völker; Gedenkschrift für Hermann Güntert zur 25. Wiederkehr seines Todestages am 23. April 1973* (Innsbruck, 1974), 35–45.

<sup>38</sup> H.B. (Harl.) §§8, 60 (Mommsen-Lot, cc. 14, 62). Cf. HG §§32–33 (Bartrum, p. 13). But evidence from inscriptions indicates a continued Irish presence in the area until at least the first half of the sixth century: K. H. Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 172; V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, R. G. Collingwood, in Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1937), 289–90; H. M. Chadwick, *Early Scotland. The Picts, the Scots, & the Welsh of Southern Scotland* (Cambridge, 1949), 147–51; P. Hunter Blair, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th S., 25 (1947), 30–7; Ifor Williams, *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, ed. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1972), 73–6 (reprinting a paper of 1951); R. Bromwich, *Trioedd*, pp. 312–13.

effectively in 1958 to dispose of this story, though her words have hardly been heeded by many later writers.<sup>40</sup> She pointed out that this story represents a typical piece of Celtic antiquarian lore, an origin-legend, a genre especially well known to students of Irish literature and historiography. Its function is a political, as well as an antiquarian, one. This example seeks to help to explain the close connexion of Wales with the Old North, *Y Gogledd*, of which by the ninth century a great part had long since ceased to belong to the Brittonic-speaking world. After 826, also, it presented a welcome parallel, no doubt much cultivated by the Second Dynasty of Gwynedd, of an outside dynasty coming to power in Gwynedd.<sup>41</sup> Finally, it explains too how the sub-kingsdoms of greater Gwynedd came into existence, by making the head of each of the pedigrees—be these figures legendary or historical—one of Cunedda's sons.

The *Historia Brittonum* of 829/30, our oldest witness to the legend, provides two very important pieces of information. First, it states that the 'migration' took place 146 years—note the precision of number—before the accession of Maelgwn of Gwynedd, which Insular scholarship placed in 534.<sup>42</sup> We are not entitled to explain away for *ex parte* reasons this figure of 146 years. If we do our sums, we arrive at the magic year of 388, that of the death of Maximus.

The other important feature is that Cunedda is described as the *atauus* of Maelgwn Gwynedd. This means, of course, the fifth ancestor, or great-great-grandfather.<sup>43</sup> The surviving pedigrees, however, dating from the mid-tenth century, make Cunedda the third ancestor of Maelgwn, or his *proauus*.<sup>44</sup> That these terms were able to be used correctly in ninth-century Wales is, however, placed beyond doubt by the correct use of *proauus* on the Pillar of Elise.<sup>45</sup> *Atauus* was not, to the highly competent Celtic genealogist, merely a general term for ancestor. The mid-tenth-century pedigrees, refashioned in several ways on behalf of the Second Dynasty of Gwynedd, have in addition been shortened by two generations, with the result that the foundation of Gwynedd is now placed *ca* 450, or at the time of the Third Pictish War.<sup>46</sup> It is the task of the historian to ask not the irrelevant question of which of these dates is a historical verity but to seek to understand why these genealogies were restructured. One may conjecture that a rereading of Gildas under the strong and growing influence of Bede's *History* caused the genealogists to think that the foundation of the native kingdoms should be contemporary with Bede's Vortigern rather than with Gildas's Maximus. We must remember here the natures of the genres with which we are dealing, and look for inspiration and strength to the considerable successes scored in recent years by Irish

\* <sup>40</sup> *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), 32–4.

<sup>41</sup> For the origins of the Second Dynasty, see Lloyd, i.323f.

<sup>42</sup> M. Miller, *B.B.C.S.* 26 (1974–6), 174 and n. 1; 272, n. 2; *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 101–3.

<sup>43</sup> *H.B.* (Harl.) §60 (Mommmsen-Lot, c. 62): *not* his great-grandfather, as Hunter Blair states, art. cit. (n. 39), 34.

<sup>44</sup> HG §1 (Bartrum, p. 9).

<sup>45</sup> In his edition of the inscription on the Pillar of Elise, Bartrum (p. 2) wrongly separates *pro auo*.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. M. Miller, *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 246–51, 257; cf. *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 109. The first two wars are dated to 383/4–389/90 and 398 respectively: see *Britannia* 6 (1975), 141–5.

historians facing the same problems, but with an abundance—rather than our paucity—of material. What is clear and important is that the perfectly incredible modern constructs of migrations from Manaw to Gwynedd organised by Maximus or Stilicho, Aetius or Vortigern, or some other pan-British representative of Roman imperial power, must be firmly rejected.

Our next figure of fifth-century history is Vortigern (as he has been known to English readers since Geoffrey of Monmouth's time), perhaps the *least* important of the major personalities in early mediaeval Welsh historiography. For one who has loomed so large in English sources and in modern historiography, this is a strange fate. After the early tenth century, Gwrtheyrn, as he is in Welsh, has practically disappeared from Welsh poetic and genealogical tradition.<sup>47</sup> Before that he is, in the literature of Wales, largely an object of hatred and contempt as one who, by his weakness, had allowed the English the opportunity to seize Britain. I presume that this, taken together with the collapse in the mid-ninth century of the Powys dynasty which claimed descent from him,<sup>48</sup> is the cause of his disappearance. Gwrtheyrn has a strange history. He may appear first in Gildas, in the mid-sixth century, as the *superbus tyrannus* who is responsible for recruiting Saxon mercenaries. But here at once we are up against a major difficulty.

The textual history of Gildas's *De Excidio* is not yet securely established. The appearance of the name of Gwrtheyrn in two manuscripts<sup>49</sup> (at I. 23: *Uortigerno* in A; *Gurthigerno* in X) raises some obvious questions which have been treated in recent years as if they were closed. The text as defined by Mommsen in 1894 is based upon a manuscript (MS C) written at St. Augustine's, Canterbury, in the tenth century<sup>50</sup> which was at once the \* earliest and, in his view, the best surviving copy; it does not contain Gwrtheyrn's name. The two other manuscripts, of the later twelfth (MS A) and early thirteenth (MS X) centuries, present a rather different text, as do the quotations in the earlier Life of St. Gildas, written in Brittany.<sup>51</sup> But the principal text of this group, Avranches MS 162 (MS A), was in a very poor textual condition and Mommsen felt safe in viewing it as an inferior and corrupted version.

In more recent years, however, two other factors have become clear. In Southern England in the late seventh, the eighth and ninth centuries, and particularly at Canterbury, a great deal of scholarly activity centred on the

<sup>47</sup> See R. Bromwich, *Trioedd*, p. 396.

<sup>48</sup> Lloyd, i.324–5. Lloyd's assertion (i.243f.) that the dynasty claimed descent from Cadell is unevicenced and completely ignores the testimony of the Pillar of Elise: cf. n. 65 below. Cf. also Bromwich, op. cit., p. 394f.

<sup>49</sup> The sigla used in the following discussion are those of the standard edition: Mommsen, op. cit. (n. 10 above), iii.1–85.

<sup>50</sup> British Library MS. Cotton Vitellius A.6; cf. N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* (2nd edn, London, 1964), 43.

<sup>51</sup> The eleventh-century Ruys Life, best edited by Ferdinand Lot, *Mélanges d'histoire bretonne (VI<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 1907), 207–83, 431–73 (reprinted from *Annales de Bretagne* 23 [1907–8] and 25 [1909–10]), but also with translation by Hugh Williams, *Gildas*, ii.322–89, quotes from *De excidio* I.3 and I.26–II.27. Wurdisten, author of the ninth-century Land-évennec Life of St. Winwaloe, plainly also knew *De Excidio*; and his disciple Wermonoc seems to have known II.31 (Mommmsen, ed. cit., iii.22f.; Williams, ii.416–18).

text of Gildas.<sup>52</sup> The tenth-century version could, therefore, be the result of much editorial work. The evidence derives from the early Anglo-Latin vocabularies—the dictionaries of their time—which often agree, in their excerpts from Gildas, with the Avranches against the Canterbury manuscript. The second factor has been the discovery of a ninth-century Breton manuscript containing a substantial series of excerpts from Book II of *De Excidio*.<sup>53</sup> This is now the earliest manuscript-witness: it agrees in almost all but blunders with the Avranches text.

A lot of work must still be done on these problems, but there is a strong chance that we shall have to reconstruct the Gildasian text principally from the Continental manuscripts and the Anglo-Latin glossaries, rather than rely—with Mommsen and his followers—on the tenth-century Canterbury text. Such a reconstruction might well require the admission of *Uortigerno* (MS A), a perfectly acceptable sixth-century form, to the text of I. 23 in the phrase *consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno*.

Gwrtheyrn's name appears in Bede, first in his work *De temporum ratione*, published in 725. Here he is *Uertigernus*, an older form of the name.<sup>54</sup> In Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, (I, 14; II, 5), published in 731, where his story appears in full, he is given the Primitive Old English form *Uurtigern(us)*, which must also derive from a written source.<sup>55</sup> And in the *Historia Brittonum*, written in Wales in 829/30, the very fullest account appears but it is one which is drawn largely from English sources; he has here the Old Welsh name *Guorthigirn(us)*. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in a section which must, at the very latest, date from the ninth century he appears in Old English form as *Wyrtegeorn*;<sup>56</sup> in some later Old English documents also he has this name.

The fact of the matter appears to be that Gwrtheyrn has become an indispensable part of the legend of Hengest and Horsa,<sup>57</sup> the story which was for the English something of what the legend of Maximus was for the Welsh. It was the English who kept the name of Gwrtheyrn alive, whereas in Wales a campaign of *damnatio memoriae* seems to have killed him off.

\* <sup>52</sup> The earliest southern English witness to the use of Gildas is Aldhelm (*ob.* 709), who was educated at Canterbury. The 'Corpus Glossary', of ca 800, from St. Augustine's, Canterbury, contains batches of Gildas-glosses, as does the 'Leiden Glossary' (St. Gallen, ca 800): for details, see W. M. Lindsay, *The Corpus, Épinal, Erfurt and Leyden Glossaries* (London, 1921). See further P. Grosjean, *Bulletin Du Cange: Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 25 (1955), 155–87, and *A.B.* 75 (1957), 185–226. Cf. M. Miller, *B.B.C.S.* 26 (1974–6), 173, n. 2.

\* <sup>53</sup> W. H. Davies, in *Christianity in Britain 300–700*, edd. M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (Leicester, 1968), 147, n. 73, first drew this witness to public attention. With his consent, I am preparing an edition of this fragment as part of a study of the textual history of *De excidio*.

<sup>54</sup> *De temporum ratione*, c. 66 (*Chronica Maiora*, §484), in Mommsen, op. cit., iii.303. This recurs (as *Uuertigernus*) in an English chronicle-fragment (of 750–850), which I published in *E.H.R.* 88 (1973), 312–14, where it is arguably drawn from Bede. H. M. Chadwick suggests, in passing, in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1954; rev. imp., 1959), 26, that Bede may have drawn this earlier form from his copy of Gildas; M. Miller, *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 252–3, suggests this more strongly.

<sup>55</sup> H. M. Chadwick, loc. cit.; K. H. Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 273; 386, n. 3; 452f. is less emphatic.

<sup>56</sup> This name deserves further investigation. In the twelfth century it is used by John of Worcester (*Chronicon Chronica*, s. a. 1029) for the name of a king of the Wends.

<sup>57</sup> For a stimulating discussion of this legend, see J. E. Turville-Petre, 'Hengest and Horsa', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 14 (1953–7), 273–90; cf. M. Miller, *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 254, n. 1.

What can we say about the historicity of Gwrtheyrn? It would be easy, looking at the ninth-century sources, to dismiss him as a figure of legend. But the evidence which points to his actual existence is, I think, too strong to be gainsaid. The early date of his story is a most important factor; with or without a name, he appears already in Gildas in the mid-sixth century. We have some very early name-forms for him. And his legend was known both in England and in Wales at a very early date. Therefore I do not think we can dismiss him, even though it is perhaps difficult to visualize the nature of his role in fifth-century Britain.

Dr. J. N. L. Myres has recently argued that the story of Hengest and Horsa with which Gwrtheyrn is associated represents not the first hiring of Saxon troops but the last—the first of those, rather, which led to the establishment of English dynasties.<sup>58</sup> Whether the personnel is real or fictitious—and I am inclined to believe that Gwrtheyrn did play a role—this seems the best possible general interpretation of our sources, which must now depend so much on fitting together the full and increasing archaeological evidence with the small, disjointed, and perhaps decreasing,<sup>59</sup> quantity of literary testimony.

We cannot say anything certain about Gwrtheyrn's position in fifth-century British politics and administration. He is perhaps best seen as an overlord of some sort, who had a general control over military matters for the territories of a group of southern *ciuitates*. More than this it would be dangerous to say (though we may note in passing that recent work on Gildas has considerable implications, for the dating of Gwrtheyrn's activity, which have not yet been worked out in a thorough way<sup>60</sup>), for we can place \* no reliance on the detail of the legends reported by Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; and I, at least, am not prepared to write fifth-century British history on the basis of legends retold from Anglo-Saxon sources by a Welshman in the ninth century.

We cannot, however, pass on without noting that a Gwrtheyrn is placed at the head of the dynasties of Powys (by the Pillar of Elise and some of the genealogies) and Buellt-Gwrtheyrnion (by the *Historia Brittonum*).<sup>61</sup> As a

<sup>58</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Pottery and the Settlement of England* (Oxford, 1969), 95–9.

\* <sup>59</sup> Wendy Davies, 'Liber Landauensis: its construction and credibility', *E.H.R.* 88 (1973), 335–51, suggests that the stock of trustworthy evidence may be augmented from the 'Celtic charter memoranda' surviving in a Llandaff version of the earlier twelfth century, for a diplomatic print of which see J. G. Evans and J. Rhys, *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv reproduced from the Gwysaney manuscript* (Oxford, 1893). She states (art. cit., p. 351) that 'the earliest charter which is free from any dubious elements is 72a, a grant from Peibio to Dubricius, probably made in the second quarter of the sixth century'. We await her major publications for substantiation of this claim.

\* <sup>60</sup> If we are to take *De Excidio* I.14–21 and I.22–26 as overlapping accounts of events in northern and southern Britain respectively—this being the thesis of M. Miller, *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 241–61—then the date of Gwrtheyrn is no longer automatically controlled by that of Aetius's third consulship. It can, in principle, lie anywhere in the period 388–ca 540, though due chronological allowance must be made for the events on either side of Gwrtheyrn's hiring of the English mercenaries. If future work suggests revision of the date of Gwrtheyrn's activities, Dr. Miller's reinterpretation of the structure of Gildas's narrative would give plenty of room for this.

<sup>61</sup> For Powys, see Bartrum, op. cit., 1–3 (Pillar of Elise). In later pedigrees, the two rival versions discussed below have been harmonized in three differing ways, but invariably in such a fashion that Cadell Ddyrnllug has been made a descendant of Gwrtheyrn: see Bartrum, op. cit., 46 (JC §18); 63 (ByS §62); 100 (ABT §6[k]), 107 (ABT §20) and 113 (HL §2[f]). For Buellt-Gwrtheyrnion, see *H.B.* (Harl.) §42 (Mommsen-Lot, c. 49).

client state or, indeed, subkingdom of Powys,<sup>62</sup> Buellt-Gwrtheyrnion would naturally have rulers who claimed descent from the same ancestors as the kings of Powys. We may compare the case of the sons of Cunedda, which I discussed earlier.

The *Historia Brittonum* and the Harleian genealogies deny this Powysian claim, and make the head of the Powys dynasty one Cadell, whom the *Historia* says is a servant or slave raised to the kingship by St. Garmon.<sup>63</sup> The full implications of this variant have not yet been worked out. It seems likely, though it cannot be proved, that the section of the *Historia Brittonum* in which this story occurs derived from the now lost *Liber Beati Germani*, to which the author refers. If so, then the most likely inventor of the story of Cadell would be a cleric of the *clas Garmon*, presumably writing somewhere in Iâl, in the central area of the saint's cult. It is hardly necessary to say that the 'Germanus' of the *Historia Brittonum* has nothing whatever to do with St. Germanus of Auxerre who, thanks to his appearance in Bede's *History*,<sup>64</sup> was a perfect candidate for identification with Garmon of Powys. He is rather the dynastic or the territorial saint of Powys. And it is an axiom of Celtic hagiography that the ancestor of the dynasty with whose territory the saint is concerned should be shown to be dependent on the favour of the saint.

There were two ways in which this could be achieved. We see one of these in the *Historia Brittonum*. Who the protagonists, Benlli and Cadell Ddyrnllug, had been in Welsh legend (if indeed they had had any previous \* existence) we do not know.<sup>65</sup> But they were adapted or created to fill the roles of two hagiographic stereotypes. Cadell was employed because Gwrtheyrn was no doubt deemed to be beyond redemption: we may perhaps see this as a major step in, or even the beginning of, the campaign of *damnatio memoriae* which eventually almost destroyed the knowledge of Gwrtheyrn in mediaeval Wales. And it is at least a plausible guess that Cadell was the name used for the new dynastic head because the king of Powys at the time was called Cadell, that Cadell ab Brochfael who died in 808.

The alternative method of linking the dynasty with the saint was that used in the official pronouncement on the Pillar of Elise. Here, any possible odium deriving from Gwrtheyrn is turned aside by having Garmon bless his

<sup>62</sup> Lloyd, i.252ff.

<sup>63</sup> *H.B.* (Harl.) §§32-33 (Mommesen-Lot, cc. 32-35). In HG §§22, 23, 27 (Bartrum, p. 12), the sons of Gwrtheyrn (as named by the *Historia Brittonum* and the Pillar of Elise) have instead been made son (Cadeyrn) and grandsons (Pasgen, Brydw) of Cadell.

\* <sup>64</sup> *H. E.* i.17-21. D. P. Kirby, *B.B.C.S.* 23 (1968-70), 49-50, also notes the conflation of Garmon and Germanus.

\* <sup>65</sup> Benlli is associated with the local place-name Foel Fenlli. Benlli Gawr, if the same person, is found only in the *Englynion y Beddau* (stanza 73: see T. Jones, *P.B.A.* 53 [1967], 112-13, 132-3) and in the *gogynfeirdd*. I see no evidence whatever for Lloyd's statement (i.243) that 'it is certain that the family which governed Powys during the period 600-850 traced their origin to Cadell'. The supposed evidence, other than the story under consideration and the pedigrees influenced by it, for a Cadelling dynasty in early Powys derives solely from two Old Welsh poems (*Marwnad Cynddylan* and *Trawsganu Cynan Garwyn*) which state that their respective Powys heroes are 'of the lineage of Cadell'. The inference is therefore permissible that they are contemporary with or later than the author of the Germanus-Cadell story.

son Brydw.<sup>66</sup> Further legitimation of the dynasty is given by making Gwrtheyrn the husband of one Sevira, a daughter of Magnus Maximus!

We therefore possess two ninth-century statements of the relationship between the dynasty of Powys and the heirs of Garmon. Both imply a close link between the two lines, a relationship which is made all the more convincing by the fact that one statement emanates from the ecclesiastical side and one from the secular. They are expressed in different ways which no doubt reflect in part the different aspirations of the two parties, the differing benefits which they hoped to gain from their mutual association.

Our last, and perhaps insoluble, problem in this connexion is whether Gwrtheyrn of Powys is our fifth-century Uortigernus, simply added to the head of the genealogy (which is about four generations too short and would place him in the mid-sixth rather than the mid-fifth century), or another and sixth-century Gwrtheyrn whose name has allowed him to become identified in legend (or to be identified by learned writers) with the Gwrtheyrn of the fifth century. In either event, we can hardly accept a view that the two are historically identical, that the fifth-century character was ancestor of the royal house of Powys, for this creates more—and quite unreal—problems than it solves.<sup>67</sup>

We come, last in the fifth century and first in the sixth, to Arthur, a man without position or ancestry in pre-Geoffrey Welsh sources. I think we can dispose of him quite briefly. He owes his place in our history books to a 'no smoke without fire' school of thought. What evidence is there for his existence? Almost twenty years ago the late Professor Thomas Jones gave us an admirably balanced account of the early evolution of the legend of Arthur. Independently, and at almost the same time, Professor K. H. Jackson published an excellent survey reaching remarkably similar conclusions.<sup>68</sup> The totality of the evidence, and it is remarkably slight until a very late date, shows Arthur as a figure of legend (or even—as Sir John Rhys pointed out last century<sup>69</sup>—of mythology). The only potentially early item<sup>70</sup> is the well known passage in the *Gododdin* where it is said of a warrior that though brave he was not Arthur.<sup>71</sup> Even the most determined protagonists of the historical Arthur admit that this could be a late inter-

<sup>66</sup> Bartrum, *op. cit.*, p. 2. Gwrthefyr, another son, seems to serve in much the same role in a Cambro-Latin fragment (perhaps of a British pseudo-history) which may be no earlier in date than the first half of the twelfth century: I have edited this in *Celtica* 12 (1977), 19-49.

<sup>67</sup> For an unconvincing attempt to solve this dilemma, see H. M. Chadwick, *loc. cit.* (n. 54), 26-33.

<sup>68</sup> 'Datblygiadau cynnar chwedl Arthur', *B.B.C.S.* 17 (1956-8), 235-52; an English translation appeared as 'The early evolution of the legend of Arthur', *N.M.S.* 8 (1964), 3-21. K. H. Jackson, in *A.L.M.A.*, pp. 1-19. An important recent paper, reviewing Jones's contribution and advancing beyond it, is R. Bromwich, *S.C.* 10-11 (1975-6), 163-81.

<sup>69</sup> *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford, 1891).

<sup>70</sup> I do not include the Glastonbury inscription (see Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 73-80, where it is assigned to the mid-tenth century). Alcock's dating seems to be accepted by Philip Rahtz, *Antiquity* 50 (1976), 163; we could do, however, with a detailed exposition of the evidence behind Alcock's suggestion. The references by Rahtz (*ibid.*) and A. Gransden (*Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 [1976], 352, nn. 5 and 7) to Jackson's review of Alcock (*Antiquity* 47 [1973], 81) as indicating that Jackson might be in favour of a late-sixth-century date for this lost inscription fail to catch the point of Jackson's remark—a *reductio ad absurdum*.

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, *The Gododdin*, p. 112 (stanza B.38).

polation, and I have already suggested above that the *Gododdin*, until more securely and precisely dated, is unacceptable as historical evidence. Arthur, as we see him in early Welsh literary sources, is on his way to becoming the central figure of the entire literature, with whom everything and everyone must in some way be associated.

Professor Alcock bases his Arthur on the entries for Badon and Camlann in the *Annales Cambrie*, and on the account of his twelve battles in the *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>72</sup> Dr. Hughes has rightly removed those annals from consideration as contemporary, or even near-contemporary, sources for the period.<sup>73</sup> The section in the *Historia Brittonum* is no less easily disposed of as historical evidence. It was proposed many years ago,<sup>74</sup> and the idea has received general assent, that this section is a Latin prose rendering of an Old Welsh battle-catalogue-poem. There is one among the allegedly genuine poems of Taliesin, a poem which perhaps contains the largest number of Old Welsh forms in that collection.<sup>75</sup> There is another, in the Red Book of Hergest, cataloguing the battles of Cadwallon, king of Gwynedd (*ob.* 634); at the very earliest it belongs to the ninth or tenth century, which is how Dr. Bromwich dates it, albeit with some hesitation.<sup>76</sup> The point is that such poems were being composed well after the time of their subject, and they contain battles which the poet thought it convenient to include. This is all part of the legendary and literary development of heroic figures.<sup>77</sup> By the time of the *Historia Brittonum*, we may be quite sure that the Arthurian legend had gathered some momentum. Observe, for example, the two occurrences of Arthur among the *mirabilia* at the end of that work.<sup>78</sup> This is not the stuff of which history can be made. The fact of the matter is that there is no historical evidence about Arthur; we must reject him from our histories and, above all, from the titles of our books.

Next, I wish to look briefly at one other major question concerning this period, namely the Heroic Age of North Britain. We have a body of 'heroic' poetry, transmitted to us in Welsh manuscripts of the thirteenth and later centuries but in the language of the Old Welsh period, purporting to belong to such an age in late-sixth-century North Britain—in particular in the area of the present Anglo-Scottish border and the Scottish lowlands

<sup>72</sup> *Arthur's Britain*, 45–71, 80–8.

<sup>73</sup> *P.B.A.* 59 (1973), 233–58.

<sup>74</sup> H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, i (Cambridge, 1932), 154f.; see also R. Bromwich, in N. K. Chadwick (ed.), *Studies in Early British History*, 124; T. Jones, *N.M.S.* 8 (1964), 9–11; K. H. Jackson, in *A.L.M.A.*, p. 7f.; I. Ll. Foster, in Foster and G. Daniel (edd.), *Prehistoric and Early Wales* (London, 1965), 230.

<sup>75</sup> *Trawsganu Cynan Garwyn*: poem no. I in the edition of Ifor Williams and J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin* (Dublin, 1968). It is translated by I. Ll. Foster, *loc. cit.*, 229f.

<sup>76</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans (ed.), *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest* (Llanbedrog, 1911), p. 14f. (cols 1043–4); it is translated by R. Bromwich, in Richard Barber, *The Figure of Arthur* (London, 1972), 98f. For her dating, see *Trioedd*, pp. 151, 182. Jackson, in *A.L.M.A.*, p. 8, says it is 'clearly much later than his day'. The manuscript was written *ca* 1400.

<sup>77</sup> And of synthetic history: see the Irish prose battle-catalogues for Tuathal Teachtmhar in R. A. S. Macalister (ed. and tr.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn. The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, Vol. 5 (Dublin, 1956), 310–19, and in verse-form in *Toirdhealbhaigh Ó Raithbheartaigh* (ed. and tr.), *Genealogical Tracts*, i (Dublin, 1932), 62–8. There are other Irish parallels.

<sup>78</sup> *H.B.* (Harl.) §§79, 80 (Mommsen-Lot, c. 73).

south of the Forth-Clyde line.<sup>79</sup> What can we know of events in this time and place? In Gildas's narrative (I. 14–21) we have, arguably,<sup>80</sup> an account of events in the north down to the writer's own time, just before the middle of the sixth century: this offers a picture of a rich, but factionalized, British society ruled by kings (I. 21). It is to the year 547 that Anglian records ascribe the beginning of the kingdom of Bernicia (under Ida);<sup>81</sup> in 549, we know of the occurrence of a great plague throughout the British Isles which had such dire effects in Ireland<sup>82</sup> (and, we may conjecture, in Britain). If the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is to be believed, the second half of the sixth century saw the rapid expansion of English power *vis-à-vis* the Britons in the south; the same process, though unchronicled, must have been occurring in the north too. The period after 550 seems, in fact, to be the beginning of a new world in the British Isles.

After 550, annals begin to be kept at Iona,<sup>83</sup> and perhaps at some other Irish centres.<sup>84</sup> The possibility of an accurate record of pagan England becomes credible, since the campaigns of Ceawlin, for example, might have been remembered in the newly converted areas in the early and mid-seventh century.<sup>85</sup> It is possible that the mid-sixth century could also be the historical horizon of the vernacular evidence in the Brittonic areas.<sup>86</sup> What is the evidence?

The *Historia Brittonum*, taking the Northumbrian regnal list from Ida in 547 as its chronological framework, purports to give a sporadic account of the wars between his successors and the British kings of the second half of the sixth century. One could feel happier about this evidence but for two major factors: this is the period of the North British heroic age, much fabled in Welsh legend and scholarly antiquarian activity of the early middle ages; the reliance on synchronization with an English king-list which is itself not above suspicion.<sup>87</sup> Both of these factors suggest the possible introduction of serious distortions into the historical record.

The *Annales Cambrie* offer a rather different picture. Their historical horizon is the battle of Arfderydd (or Arthuret, near Carlisle) in 573, a

<sup>79</sup> Its literature is best studied as a whole, and within a heroic context, by H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, Vol. I; for a survey of the characteristics of an heroic age, see *ibid.*, iii (Cambridge, 1940), 727–49. A convenient summary is given by C. Maurice Bowra, *The Meaning of a Heroic Age* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1957); cf. his *Heroic Poetry* (London, 1952), 508–36, for his general remarks on the usefulness or otherwise of heroic poetry for the historian.

<sup>80</sup> M. Miller, *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 241–61.

<sup>81</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* V.24, *recapitulatio*; the Moore Memoranda, edited by Peter Hunter Blair, *The Moore Bede* (Copenhagen, 1959), p. 13, and, with a full study, in Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (edd.), *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe* (H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies) (Cambridge, 1950), 243–57.

<sup>82</sup> Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), 65–7; Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* (Dublin, 1972), 101–3.

<sup>83</sup> F. J. Byrne, 'Seventh-century documents', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 5th S., 108 (1967), 164–82 (esp. 178–82); A. P. Smyth, *P.R.I.A.* 72 C (1972), 1–48.

<sup>84</sup> K. Harrison, *S.C.* 12 (1977), 12–13 (1977–8), 17–32.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. F. M. Stenton, *Preparatory to 'Anglo-Saxon England'*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970), 119–21.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. M. Miller, *T.C.W.A.A.S.*, N. S., 75 (1975), 96.

<sup>87</sup> While I do not accept many of the arguments of D. P. Kirby, 'Bede and Northumbrian chronology', *E.H.R.* 78 (1963), 514–27 (cf. my paper 'On the North British Section of the *Historia Brittonum*', n. 15 above), I do feel that the king-list smacks of *ex parte* affiliations and expects us to take too much on trust.

battle famed in Welsh legend for its ferocity and horror.<sup>88</sup> A small cluster of northern entries ends in 595 with a note of the death of Dunod, perhaps a king belonging to a royal line which ruled the Cumberland coastal area in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.<sup>89</sup> For the compiler of the extant version of this part of *Annales Cambrie*, this quarter-century, marked by a brief series of entries presumably as aids to memory, was the North British heroic age. In a recent detailed survey and skilful analysis of these entries, Dr. Miller has argued that we must assume much knowledge, rather than much ignorance, on the part of the compiler of this brief section.<sup>90</sup> But we have—as yet at least—no means of telling when this group of annals was written. In principle this could have occurred at any time up to about 950. The *Annales Cambrie* drew on a North British chronicle—whose former existence is also documented by its use in the Irish annals—which was kept up until the late eighth century;<sup>91</sup> at what point it became a contemporary record is not yet clear, however. In general, these Annals are a much better source for seventh-century North British history than is the *Historia Brittonum* whose author's attempts at synchronization have led to a number of grievous misunderstandings.<sup>92</sup> The sort of thing that could go wrong in the synchronization of legendary heroic material with a dated record, especially a foreign one, is shown in the equation in the *Historia Brittonum* of the late-sixth-century Eda Glinfawr (Eda big-knee) with the eighth-century Northumbrian noble Eata.<sup>93</sup>

There is some evidence, too, to suggest that the second half of the sixth century forms the historical horizon of most Welsh pedigree records.<sup>94</sup> However, we must remember that these genealogies were never intended as historical records in our modern sense. Even granting that they may preserve genuine sixth-century data, we have still to work our way through a forest of early Welsh antiquarian activity to reach a clearing in which to begin the construction of a late-sixth-century North British history. There is a vast amount of work to be done here, but we rush it at our peril.<sup>95</sup>

In short, then, the Welsh literary sources of the ninth century and later tell us of personalities and seem to give us a simplistic view of the politics,

<sup>88</sup> See M. Miller, *T.C.W.A.A.S.*, N. S., 75 (1975), 96–8.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–10.

<sup>90</sup> M. Miller, 'The commanders at Arthuret', *T.C.W.A.A.S.*, N. S., 75 (1975), 96–118 (esp. 117).

<sup>91</sup> K. Hughes, *P.B.A.* 59 (1973), 239; 240, n. 3. Cf. M. Miller, *B.B.C.S.* 26 (1974–6), 259, 261 (Table I), who alludes to this and uses the Irish sources, as does D. P. Kirby, *T.C.W.A.A.S.*, N. S., 62 (1962), 82–4. We still await a proper study, however.

<sup>92</sup> Against K. Hughes, art. cit., 237–9; see my review of Hughes, in *S.C.* 12–13 (1977–8), 461–7, and the paper cited in n. 15 above.

<sup>93</sup> As pointed out by R. Bromwich, *Trioedd*, p. 337, and by K. H. Jackson in *Celt and Saxon. Studies in the Early British Border*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1963; rev. imp., 1964), 43–4. The coincidence of spelling of OW *Eta* and OE *Eata* was no doubt the decisive factor.

<sup>94</sup> M. Miller, *B.B.C.S.* 26 (1974–6), 271; but, for a useful reminder that even for the following century the evidence of an official pedigree constructed in the mid-tenth century can be far from historically reliable, see *S.C.* 10–11 (1975–6), 101–9.

<sup>95</sup> We need a study of the full chronological extent of the North British heroic age presupposed by the surviving Welsh sources. It could be argued that the total length of the North British heroic age—at least, so far as it is represented in the literature—was about a quarter-century or so at the end of the sixth century. Whether this is likely to be true, or whether it is merely a reflection of a historical horizon at ca 550, needs a good deal of careful thought and investigation.

wars, and migrations of the period. (There are aspects of this—for example, the migrations from Britain to Brittany and from Ireland to Britain<sup>96</sup>—which I have not discussed here.) Of the other great issues they tell us—and indeed purport to tell us—almost nothing. Even about the issues concerning which we might expect our Celtic sources to be informative—the creation of the successor-states to the Roman *imperium* in Britain, and the demise of many of them—they are singularly unsatisfactory. Our only substantial and early record of this process, apart from the implications to be drawn from St. Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus* for later-fifth-century Strathclyde, is Gildas's view of five kings of Wales and \* south-west Britain in the mid-sixth-century. His evidence indicates the existence of several kingdoms—three of which are clearly identifiable (even if their territorial extent is not clear)—which seem to have been created not later than ca A.D. 500; similar indications of developing royal power may be deduced, at least for north Britain, from his narrative in Book I. He shows us, too, a church under episcopal government, and gives some evidence for the existence of British monasticism. To supplement this picture, however, we must turn, via the remarkable series of post-Roman stone inscriptions which survives in the Brittonic north, west, and south-west of this island from the fifth century onwards, to the archaeological evidence.<sup>97</sup>

As far as our literary sources are concerned, Gildas is our prime text for the outline history of the period from the end of Roman rule to the mid-sixth-century. He alone seems to have had access to contemporary sources for the fifth century and was an eye-witness to the earlier sixth.<sup>98</sup> (For the later fifth century Patrick's *Confession* and *Letter to Coroticus* are of use for some more specialist purposes.)

For the later sixth century a range of difficult sources comes into play, including Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. But Bede is not a primary source for later-sixth-century history, any more than he is for the fifth century.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> The most recent treatments of the Breton migration are by N. K. Chadwick, 'The colonisation of Brittany', *P.B.A.* 51 (1965), 235–99, and *Early Brittany* (Cardiff, 1969); her conclusions about the migration have not been received with universal approbation, however. See also Kenneth H. Jackson, *A Historical Phonology of Breton* (Dublin, 1967), 21ff. For Irish movements to Britain, see John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974); C. Thomas, 'Irish colonies in post-Roman Western Britain: a survey of the evidence', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, N. S. 6 (1969–72), 251–74; M. Richards, 'The Irish settlements in South-West Wales: a topographical approach', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 90 (1960), 133–52; K. H. Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 166–76.

<sup>97</sup> The inscriptions are collected and introduced by V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950); cf. Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 149–93. For some general surveys of the archaeological evidence, see J. N. L. Myres, 'Archaeology and history: Britons and Saxons in the post-Roman centuries', *Council for British Archaeology Report No. 11* (1960–1), 35–45; Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 142–350; Lloyd Laing, *The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland, c. 400–1200 A.D.* (London, 1975).

<sup>98</sup> See, in general, M. Miller, 'Bede's use of Gildas', *E.H.R.* 90 (1975), 241–61.

<sup>99</sup> As H. M. Chadwick reminds us: loc. cit. (n. 54 above), 21. An instructive study of Bede's scholarly activity with reference to the Roman period is M. Miller, 'Bede's Roman dates', *C.M.* 31 (1970), 239–52. For the question of his oral and written sources, chiefly for the seventh century, and how he employed them in writing history, see D. P. Kirby, 'Bede's native sources for the "Historia Ecclesiastica"', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1966), 341–71; Kirby pursues the matter further, with special reference to the problem of Bishop Wilfrid, in his *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1974), 1–34.

and we must remember that his construct is a scholarly one, based on inference from a limited range of source-texts. It has stood the test of time well, perhaps too well. Because his work is a fine piece of scholarship, a mine of information, and written in a clear Latin style, it does not follow that we should necessarily accept his view of centuries for which he is at best a secondary authority as more reliable than that of any modern scholar. The argument that Bede lived much nearer to the fifth and sixth centuries than we do should not be allowed to cut any ice.

The twentieth-century historiographical problem *vis-à-vis* the fifth and sixth centuries has been to relate the traditionally-employed historical, or pseudo-historical, sources to the new evidence offered by archaeology. Our literary sources must remain the basis for a history of the period, as only a highly attenuated form of history can be written from purely archaeological evidence. It is therefore all the more incumbent upon historians and students of language and literature to scrutinize thoroughly all the sources which they might contribute to this historiographical process. We need to understand the sources, motives and technical terminology of each of our writers. We cannot accept a text, or an item in a text, simply on the ground that it appears to derive from 'tradition'. This all too common excuse is by itself meaningless. What is 'tradition'? Whose tradition? Monastic, legal, craft tradition? And once we begin to ask questions of this sort, we are forced to ask ourselves about the processes of transmission, with all the further questions and critical judgments which that implies. But increasingly the bulk of our evidence will be archaeological and we must have ready the right questions to ask of it. The recent books on the period seem to me to have failed to attempt even a twentieth-century view of fifth- and sixth-century history, much less a fifth- or sixth-century view. Their historiography has given us what is in all essentials a mediaeval view of the period. Our difficult, but far from impossible, task is to profit from and improve upon their failure.